AT THE GATE OF THE CONVENT



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AND OTHER POEMS

BY

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PRELUDE.

I.

I LOVE to think that when I first
Wailed in my mother's womb,
The eggs were hatched, the buds had burst
And hawthorns were in bloom.

II.

For thus it must have been I gained
The vernal need to sing,
And, while a suckling, blindly drained
The instinct of the Spring.

III.

The earliest sound that greeted me,
Was the ousel's ringing tone;
The earliest sight, lambs frisking free
Round barked oaks newly thrown.

IV.

The gray-green elder whitened slow
As in my crib I slept;
And merles to wonder stilled my woe,
When I awoke and wept.

V.

When held up to the window pane,
What fixed my baby stare?
The glory of the glittering rain,
And newness everywhere.

VI.

The yaffel played at hide and seek,
Now blurting to the ken
Where he was lost, with scampish shriek,
Then hid and hushed again.

VII.

Bold in the border far away,
The guelder snowballs shone,
Mimicking Winter now that they
Felt certain he was gone.

VIII.

The doe was followed by her fawn;
The swan built in the reeds:
A something whitened all the lawn,
And yellowed all the meads.

IX.

The cuckoo taught me how to laugh,
The nightingale to mourn:
The poet is half grief, and half
The soul of mirth and scorn.

X.

My lullaby, the bees astir
Wherever sweetness dwells;
The dogwood and laburnum were
My coral and my bells.

XI.

My virgin sense of sound was steeped
In the music of young streams;
And roses through the casement peeped,
And scented all my dreams.

XII.

And so it is that still to-day
I cannot choose but sing,
Remain a foster-child of May,
And a suckling of the Spring:

XIII.

That to Nurse-Nature's voice and touch
I shape my babbling speech,
And still stretch feeble hands to clutch
Something beyond my reach:

XIV.

That in my song you catch at times
Note sweeter far than mine,
And in the tangle of my rhymes
Can scent the eglantine;

XV.

That though my verse but roam the air
And murmur 'mong the trees,
You may discern a purpose there,
As in music of the bees.

XVI.

Hence too it is, from wintry tomb
When earth revives, and when
A quickening comes to Nature's womb,
That I am born again.

XVII.

I feel no more the snow of years;
Sap mounts, and pulses bound;
My eyes are filled with happy tears,
My ears with happy sound.

XVIII.

Anew I listen to the low
Fond cooing of the dove,
And smile unto myself to know
I still am loved and love.

XIX.

My manhood keeps the dew of morn,
And what I have I give;
Being right glad that I was born,
And thankful that I live.

May 30, 1884.

AT THE GATE OF THE CONVENT.

I.

Beside the Convent Gate I stood,
  Lingering to take farewell of those
To whom I owed the simple good
  Of three days' peace, three nights' repose.

II.

My sumpter-mule did blink and blink;
  Was nothing more to munch or quaff;
Antonio, far too wise to think,
  Leaned vacantly upon his staff.

III.

It was the childhood of the year:
  Bright was the morning, blithe the air;
And in the choir I plain could hear
  The monks still chanting matin prayer.

IV.

The throstle and the blackbird shrilled,
Loudly as in an English copse,
Fountain-like note that, still refilled,
Rises and falls, but never stops.

V.

As lush as in an English chase,
The hawthorn, guessed by its perfume,
With folds on folds of snowy lace,
Blindfolded all its leaves with bloom.

VI.

Scarce seen, and only faintly heard,
A torrent, mid far snow-peaks born,
Sang kindred with the gurgling bird,
Flowed kindred with the foaming thorn.

VII.

The chanting ceased, and soon instead
Came shuffling sound of sandalled shoon;
Each to his cell and narrow bed
Withdrew, to pray and muse till noon.

VIII.

Only the Prior—for such their Rule—
Into the morning sunshine came.
Antonio bared his locks; the mule
Kept blinking, blinking, just the same.

IX.

I thanked him with a faltering tongue;
I thanked him with a flowing heart.
"This for the poor." His hand I wrung,
And gave the signal to depart.

X.

But still in his he held my hand,
As though averse that I should go.
His brow was grave, his look was bland,
His beard was white as Alpine snow.

XI.

And in his eye a light there shone,
A soft, subdued, but steadfast ray,
Like to those lamps that still burn on
In shrines where no one comes to pray.

XII.

And in his voice I seemed to hear
The hymns that novice-sisters sing,
When only anguished Christ is near,
And earth and life seem vanishing.

XIII.

"Why do you leave us, dear my son?
Why from calm cloisters backward wend,
Where moil is much and peace is none,
And journeying hath nor bourne nor end?

XIV.

"Read I your inmost soul aright,
Heaven hath to you been strangely kind;
Gave gentle cradle, boyhood bright,
A fostered soul, a tutored mind.

XV.

"Nor wealth did lure, nor penury cramp,
Your ripening soul; it lived and throve,
Nightly beside the lettered lamp,
Daily in field, and glade, and grove.

XVI.

"And when the dawn of manhood brought
The hour to choose to be of those
Who serve for gold, or sway by thought,
You doubted not, and rightly chose.

XVII.

"Loving your Land, you face the strife;
Loved by the Muse, you shun the throng;
And blend within your dual life
The patriot's pen, the poet's song.

XVIII.

"Hence now, in gaze mature and wise,
Dwells scorn of praise, dwells scorn of blame;
Calm consciousness of surer prize
Than dying noise of living fame.

XIX.

"Have you not loved, been loved, as few
Love, or are loved, on loveless earth?
How often have you felt its dew?
Say, have you ever known its dearth?

XX.

"I speak of love divorced from pelf,
I speak of love unyoked and free,
Of love that deadens sense of self,
Of love that loveth utterly.

XXI.

"And this along your life hath flowed
In full and never-failing stream,
Fresh from its source, unbought, unowed,
Beyond your boyhood's fondest dream."

XXII.

He paused. The cuckoo called. I thought
Of English voices, English trees.
The far-off fancy instant brought
The tears; and he, misled by these,

XXIII.

With hand upon my shoulder, said,
"You own 'tis true. The richest years
Bequeathe the beggared heart, when fled,
Only this legacy of tears.

XXIV.

"Why is it that all raptures cloy?
Though men extol, though women bless,
Why are we still chagrined with joy,
Dissatisfied with happiness?

XXV.

"Yes, the care-flouting cuckoo calls,
And yet your smile betokens grief,
Like meditative light that falls
Through branches fringed with autumn leaf.

XXVI.

"Whence comes this shadow? You are now
In the full summer of the soul.
The answer darkens on your brow:
'Winter the end, and death the goal.'

XXVII.

"Yes, vain the fires of pride and lust
Fierce in meridian pulses burn:
Remember, Man, that thou art dust,
And unto dust thou shalt return.

XXVIII.

"Rude are our walls, our beds are rough,
But use is hardship's subtle friend.
He hath got all that hath enough;
And rough feels softest, in the end.

XXIX.

"While luxury hath this disease,
It ever craves and pushes on.
Pleasures, repeated, cease to please,
And rapture, once 'tis reaped, is gone.

XXX.

"My flesh hath long since ceased to creep,
Although the hairshirt pricketh oft.
A plank my couch; withal, I sleep
Soundly as he that lieth soft.

XXXI.

"And meagre though may be the meal
That decks the simple board you see,
At least, my son, we never feel
The hunger of satiety.

XXXII.

"You have perhaps discreetly drunk:
O, then, discreetly, drink no more!
Which is the happier, worldling, monk,
When youth is past, and manhood o'er?

XXXIII.

"Of life beyond I speak not yet.
'Tis solitude alone can e'er,
By hushing controversy, let
Man catch earth's undertone of prayer.

XXXIV.

"Your soul which Heaven at last must reap,
From too much noise hath barren grown;
Long fallow silence must it keep,
Ere faith revive, and grace be sown.

XXXV.

"Let guide and mule alone return.
For you I will prepare a cell,
In whose calm silence you will learn,
Living or dying, All is well!"

XXXVI.

Again the cuckoo called; again
The merle and mavis shook their throats;
The torrent rambled down the glen,
The ringdoves cooed in sylvan cotes.

XXXVII.

The hawthorn moved not, but still kept
As fixedly white as far cascade;
The russet squirrel frisked and leapt
From breadth of sheen to breadth of shade.

XXXVIII.

I did not know the words had ceased,
I thought that he was speaking still,
Nor had distinguished sacred priest
From pagan thorn, from pagan rill.

XXXIX.

Not that I had not harked and heard;
But all he bade me shun or do,
Seemed just as sweet as warbling bird,
But not more grave and not more true.

XL.

So deep yet indistinct my bliss,
That when his counsels ceased to sound,
That one sweet note I did not miss
From other sweet notes all around.

XLI.

But he, misreading my delight,
Again with urging accents spoke.
Then I, like one that's touched at night,
From the deep swoon of sweetness woke.

XLII.

And just as one that, waking, can
Recall the thing he dreamed, but knows
'Twas of the phantom world that man
Visits in languors of repose;

XLIII.

So, though I straight repictured plain
All he had said, it seemed to me,
Recalled from slumber, to retain
No kinship with reality.

XLIV.

"Father, forgive!" I said; "and look!
Who taught its carolling to the merle?
Who wed the music to the brook?
Who decked the thorn with flakes of pearl?

XLV.

"'Twas He, you answer, that did make
Earth, sea, and sky: He maketh all;
The gleeful notes that flood the brake,
The sad notes wailed in Convent stall.

XLVI.

"And my poor voice He also made;
And like the brook, and like the bird,
And like your brethren mute and staid,
I too can but fulfil His word.

XLVII.

"Were I about my loins to tie
A girdle, and to hold in scorn
Beauty and Love, what then were I
But songless stream, but flowerless thorn?

XLVIII.

"Why do our senses love to list
When distant cataracts murmur thus?
Why stealeth o'er your eyes a mist
When belfries toll the Angelus?

XLIX.

"It is that every tender sound
Art can evoke, or Nature yield,
Betokens something more profound,
Hinted, but never quite revealed.

L.

"And though it be the self-same Hand
That doth the complex concert strike,
The notes, to those that understand,
Are individual, and unlike.

LI.

"Allow my nature. All things are,
If true to instinct, well and wise.
The dewdrop hinders not the star;
The waves do not rebuke the skies.

LII.

"So leave me free, good Father dear,
While you on humbler, holier chord
Chant your secluded Vespers here,
To fling my matin notes abroad.

LIII.

"While you with sacred sandals wend
To trim the lamp, to deck the shrine,
Let me my country's altar tend,
Nor deem such worship less divine.

LIV.

"Mine earthly, yours celestial love:
Each hath its harvest; both are sweet.
You wait to reap your Heaven, above;
I reap the Heaven about my feet.

LV.

"And what if I—forgive your guest
Who feels, so frankly speaks, his qualm—
Though calm amid the world's unrest,
Should restless be amid your calm?

LVI.

"But though we two be severed quite,
Your holy words will sound between
Our lives, like stream one hears at night,
Louder, because it is not seen.

LVII.

"Father, farewell! Be not distressed;
And take my vow, ere I depart,
To found a Convent in my breast,
And keep a cloister in my heart."

LVIII.

The mule from off his ribs a fly
Flicked, and then zigzagged down the road.
Antonio lit his pipe, and I
Behind them somewhat sadly strode.

LIX.

Just ere the Convent dipped from view,
Backward I glanced: he was not there.
Within the chapel, well I knew,
His lips were now composed in prayer.

LX.

But I have kept my vow. And when
The cuckoo chuckleth o'er his theft,
When throstles sing, again, again,
And runnels gambol down the cleft,

LXI.

With these I roam, I sing with those,
And should the world with smiles or jeers
Provoke or lure, my lids I close,
And draw a cowl about my ears.

THE SPRING-TIME, O THE SPRING-TIME!

I.

THE Spring-time, O the Spring-time!
Who does not know it well?
When the little birds begin to build,
And the buds begin to swell.
When the sun with the clouds plays hide-and-seek,
And the lambs are bucking and bleating,
And the colour mounts to the maiden's cheek,
And the cuckoo scatters greeting;
In the Spring-time, joyous Spring-time!

II.

The Summer, O the Summer!
Who does not know it well?
When the ringdoves coo the long day through,
And the bee refills his cell.

When the swish of the mower is heard at morn,
And we all in the woods go roaming,
And waiting is over, and love is born,
And shy lips meet in the gloaming;
In the Summer, ripening Summer!

III.

The Autumn, O the Autumn!
Who does not know it well?
When the leaf turns brown, and the mast drops down,
And the chesnut splits its shell.
When we muse o'er the days that have gone before,
And the days that will follow after,
When the grain lies deep on the winnowing-floor,
And the plump gourd hangs from the rafter;
In the Autumn, thoughtful Autumn!

IV.

The Winter, O the Winter!
Who does not know it well?
When, day after day, the fields stretch gray,
And the peewit wails on the fell.

When we close up the crannies and shut out the cold,
And the wind sounds hoarse and hollow,
And our dead loves sleep in the churchyard mould,
And we pray that we soon may follow;
In the Winter, mournful Winter!

AN AUTUMN-BLOOMING ROSE.

I.

I FOUND, and plucked, an autumn-blooming rose,
And shut my eyes, and scented all its savour:
When lo! as in the month the blackthorn blows,
Lambs 'gan to bleat, and merle and lark to quaver.

II.

Flower of my life! inestimably dear,
Now that its calendar wanes sere and sober,
To me your freshness, turning back the year,
Makes that seem April others call October.

III.

With me 'tis Autumn, and with you 'tis Spring,
But Love hath brought these seasons sweet together.
Within your leafy life I sit and sing,
And you with me share wealth of harvest weather.

IV.

Thus all things we exchange, and nothing lose:
  Take you life's wisdom, lend to me life's sweetness.
Your vernal voice shall wed my mellow muse,
  And song give youth, and youth give song, completeness.

A QUESTION.

Love, wilt thou love me still when wintry streak
Steals on the tresses of autumnal brow;
When the pale rose hath perished in my cheek,
And those are wrinkles that are dimples now?
Wilt thou, when this fond arm that here I twine
Round thy dear neck to help thee in thy need,
Droops faint and feeble, and hath need of thine,
Be then my prop, and not a broken reed?
When thou canst only glean along the Past,
And garner in thy heart what Time doth leave,
O, wilt thou then to me, love, cling as fast
As nest of April to December eave;
And, while my beauty dwindles and decays,
Still warm thee by the embers of my gaze?

AN ANSWER.

Come, let us go into the lane, love mine,
And mark and gather what the Autumn grows:
The creamy elder mellowed into wine,
The russet hip that was the pink-white rose;
The amber woodbine into rubies turned,
The blackberry that was the bramble born;
Nor let the seeded clematis be spurned,
Nor pearls, that now are corals, of the thorn.
Look! what a lovely posy we have made
From the wild garden of the waning year.
So when, dear love, your summer is decayed,
Beauty more touching than is clustered here
Will linger in your life, and I shall cling
Closely as now, nor ask if it be Spring.

OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE CHURCH.

I.

"The old Church doors stand open wide,
Though neither bells nor anthems peal.
Gazing so fondly from outside,
Why do you enter not and kneel?

II.

"It is the sunset hour when all
Begin to feel the need to pray,
Upon our common Father call
To guard the night, condone the day.

III.

"Is it proud scorn, or humble doubt,
That keeps you standing, lingering, there;
Half in the Church, and half without,
Midway betwixt the world and prayer?

IV.

" No meeter moment could there be
For man to talk alone with God.
The careless sexton has, you see,
Shouldered his spade, and homeward trod.

V.

" The Vicar's daily round is done;
Has back just sank below the brow.
He passed the porches, one by one,
That line the hamlet street, and now

VI.

" He, in his garden, cons the page,
And muses on to-morrow's text.
The homebound rustic counts his wage,
The same last week, the same the next.

VII.

" Nor priest nor hind are you, but each
Alike is welcome here within;
Both they who learn, and they who teach,
Have secret sorrow, secret sin.

VIII.

" Enter, and bare your inmost sore;
Enter, and weep your stain away;
Leave doubt and darkness at the door;
Come in and kneel, come in and pray."

IX.

Such were the words I seemed to hear,
By no one uttered, but alack!
The voice of many a bygone year,
Striking the church, and echoing back.

X.

I entered not, but on a stone
Sate, that recorded some one's loss;
But name and date no more were shown,
The deep-cut lines were smooth with moss.

XI.

Below were longsome tags of rhyme,
But what, you could not now surmise.
Alas! alas! that death and time
Should overgrow love's eulogies.

XII.

Round me was Death that plainly spoke
The hopes and aims that life denied;
The curious pomp of simple folk,
The pedantry of rustic pride.

XIII.

Some slept in square sepulchral caves,
Some were stretched flat, and some inurned;
And there were fresh brown baby graves,
Resembling cradles overturned.

XIV.

From where I sate I still could watch
The old oak pews, the altar white.
Gable and oasthouse, tile and thatch,
Smiled softly in the sunset light.

XV.

From here and there a cottage roof,
Spires of blue vapour 'gan to steal;
To eyes of love a heavenly proof
The mother warmed the evening meal.

XVI.

No more the mill-stream chafed and churned;
The wheel hung still, the meal lay whole;
From marsh and dyke the rooks returned,
And circled round and round the toll.

XVII.

The lambs were mute, the sheep were couched,
The hop-poles bent 'neath leaf and bine;
Adown the road the vagrant slouched,
And glanced up at the alehouse sign.

XVIII.

Again I heard the unseen voice:
"Why do you come not in and rest?
Whether you grieve or you rejoice,
You here will be a welcome guest.

XIX.

"To Heaven it is the half-way house,
Where hope can feed, and anguish may
Recline its limbs and rest its brows,
With simple thanks for ample pay.

XX.

"Was it not here you got the name
Which is of you so close a part,
That, uttered, it hath magic claim
To flush love's cheek, to flood love's heart?

XXI.

"Here too it was, when youth confessed
The weariness of random ways,
And felt a surging in the breast
For faithful nights and fruitful days,

XXII.

"You came with one who, conquering fear
When love surprised first thought to fly,
Acknowledged with a tender tear
The sweetness of captivity.

XXIII.

"And here 'twill be when you have ta'en
Last look of love, last look of Spring,
When hearts for you will yearn in vain,
And vain for you the birds will sing,

XXIV.

"That shuffling feet and slow will come,
With cumbrous coffin, gloomy pall,
And, while within you moulder dumb,
That prayers will rise and tears will fall.

XXV.

'And should Death haply prove your friend,
And what in life was scorned should save,
Hither it is that feet will wend,
To read the name upon your grave."

XXVI.

I heard the voice no more. The rooks
Had ceased to float, had ceased to caw;
The sunlight lingered but in nooks,
And, gazing toward the west, I saw,

XXVII.

Beyond the pasture's withered bents,
Upstanding hop, recumbent fleece,
And sheaves of wheat, like weathered tents,
A twilight bivouac of peace.

XXVIII.

Into itself the voice withdrew.
A something subtle all around
Came floating on the rising dew,
And sweetness took the place of sound.

XXIX.

No word of mine, although my heart
Rebelled, the scented stillness shook;
But silence seemed to take my part,
Thus mildly answering mild rebuke:

XXX.

"'Tis true I have to you not brought
My eager or despondent mood,
But still by wood and stream have sought
The sanctity of solitude.

XXXI.

"But as a youth who quits his home
To range in tracts of freër fame,
However far or wide he roam,
Dwells fondly on his mother's name;

XXXII.

"So bear me witness, dear old Church,
Although apart our ritual be,
I ne'er have breathed one word to smirch
The Creed that bore and suckled me.

XXXIII.

"Not mine presumptuous thought to cope
With sage's faith, with saint's belief,
Or proudly mock the humble hope
That solaced the Repentant Thief.

XXXIV.

"I do not let the elms, that shut
My garden in from world without,
Exclude your sacred presence, but
I lop them when they shoot and sprout;

XXXV.

"That I at eve, that I at dawn,
That I, when noons are warm and still,
Lying or lingering on the lawn,
May see your tower upon the hill.

XXXVI.

“But when Faith grows a sophist’s theme,
And chancels ring with doubt and din,
I sometimes think that they who seem
The most without, are most within.

XXXVII.

“The name you gave, that name I bear;
The bond you sealed, I sacred keep;
And when my brain is dust and air,
Let me within your precincts sleep.”

XXXVIII.

The sexton came and scanned once more
The neat square pit of smooth blue clay,
Then turned the key and locked the door,
And so, like him, I went my way.

XXXIX.

I had the summons not obeyed;
I had nor knelt nor uttered word;
But somehow felt that I had prayed,
And somehow felt I had been heard.

TO BEATRICE STUART-WORTLEY.

ÆTAT 2.

I.

PATTER, patter, little feet,
Making music faint and sweet,
Up the passage, down the stair;
Patter, patter everywhere.

II.

Ripple, ripple, little voice;
When I hear you, I rejoice.
When you cease to crow and coo,
Then my heart grows silent too.

III.

Frolic, frolic, little form,
While the day is young and warm.
When the shadows shun the west,
Climb up to my knee, and rest.

IV.

Slumber, slumber, little head,
Gambols o'er and night-prayers said.
I will give you in your cot
Kisses that awake you not.

V.

Open, open, little lids!
Lambs are frisking in the meads;
Blackcaps flit from stem to stem;
Come and chirp along with them.

VI.

Change not, change not, little fay;
Still be as you are to-day.
What a loss is growth of sense,
With decrease of innocence!

VII.

Something in your little ways
Wins me more than love or praise.
You have gone, and I feel still
Void I somehow cannot fill.

VIII.

Yes, you leave, when you depart,
Empty cradle in my heart,
Where I sit and rock my pain,
Singing lullaby in vain.

IX.

Come back, come back, little feet!
Bring again the music sweet
To the garden, to the stair;
Patter, chatter everywhere.

HYMN TO DEATH.

I.

What is it haunts the summer air?
A sense of something lately passed away;
Something pleasant, something fair,
That was with us yesterday,
And is no longer there.
Now from the pasture comes no baby bleat,
Nor the frisk of frolic feet
There is seen.
Blossom and bloom have spread their wings, and flown,
And the bosks and orchards green
The rosy flush of childhood have outgrown.
Lapwing and linnet and lark have fledged their brood;
Mavis and merle have gotten their desire;
The nightingale begins to tire;
Even the cuckoo's note hath fitful grown;
And in the closing leafage of the wood
The ringdove now is left to coo alone.

II.

Then revel in your roses, reckless June!
Revel and ripen swift to your decay.
But your turn will follow soon,
And the rounding harvest-moon
Avenge the too brief innocence of May.
Yet once again there scents the morning air
The soul of something passed away;
Something precious, something fair,
That was breathing yesterday,
And is no longer there.
It is Autumn, dying, dying,
With her leaves around her lying,
And Winter, beggared heir, unprofitably sighing.
Let her die.
Unto us as unto her
Earth is but a sepulchre,
And the over-arching sky
Neither asks nor wonders why
Those who here are left behind
Season sweet and spacious mind
Fain would save;
Yet with pale visages and streaming tears

Must watch the harvest of the ripened years
Locked in the bootless granary of the grave.

III.

Why do you call me hence?
To purge what fault, to punish what offence?
Had I maligned my lot,
Or ever once the privilege forgot
Of being, though the spirit's inward sense,
Mirror and measure of all things that are,
Then it were right, were just,
That, like a falling leaf or failing star,
The winds of Heaven should blow about my dust.
Or had I used the years as waifs and strays,
To build myself a comfortable nest,
Groped life for golden garbage, like the rest,
And, as a lacquey, on the public ways
For private profit hired out my tongue,
Then against death 'twere vain to plead,
Then, then t'were meet indeed
I should grow silenced, like a bell unrung.
But bear me witness, every Spring that came
Since first with trembling furtive frame

Out of my little crib I crept
While others slept,
Because to me the rising moon
Was more than sleep, or toy, or boon,
That never yet the thrush resumed to sing,
But my heart straight did build, my voice was on the wing;
Found the first primrose gazing frank
From its cradle in the bank,
Harked for the cuckoo days before he called,
Then halted, at his note enthralled.

IV.

Why do you beckon to another sphere?
Here was I born,
Am deeply rooted here,
And would not be uptorn.
I want no other fields than these,
No other skies,
No redder dawn to break on bluer seas,
No brighter stars to rise.
Neither do I crave to know
The origin of joy and woe.

I love the doubt, the dark, the fear,
That still surroundeth all things here.
I love the mystery, nor seek to solve;
Content to let the stars revolve,
Nor ask to have their meaning clear.
Enough for me, enough to feel;
To let the mystic shadows steal
Into a land whither I cannot follow;
To see the stealthy sunlight leave
Dewy dingle, dappled hollow;
To watch, when falls the hour of eve,
Quiet shadows on a quiet hill;
To watch, to wonder, and be still.

V.

And can it be,
That there will break the day,
For me, for me,
When I no more shall hear the throstle flute;
Not because his voice is mute,
But that my soul sleeps stupefied in clay?
Never! what, never again!
Deep within some silent glen
To make a couch with peace, far from surmise of men.

Never, never more to stand,
Spell-bound in a leafy land,
Lie among the grasses tall,
Hear the yaffel call, and call,
And lazily watch the lazy clouds slow floating over all.
That time and life will be, but I shall ne'er
Find little feet upon the stair,
Feel little arms about my throat,
Hear little gleeful voices float
Upon the wavelets of the summer air.
That I again shall never share
The peace that lies upon an English lawn,
Watch the last lingering planet shining fair
Upon the unwrinkled forehead of the dawn.
Never, never, never more,
When fate or fancy bids me roam,
Lessen with loving thoughts the last long mile
That leads unto my home,
Descry the roses down the casement falling,
Hear the garden thrushes calling,
Behold my dear ones standing at the door,
Void of fear, void of guile,

And hail, as I so oft have hailed before,
The broadening salutation of their smile!

VI.

Who will salute me There?
Who, who come forth to greet?
Will Virgil stand upon the golden stair?
Shall I take Spenser's hand, and sit at Shakespeare's feet?
Will Galileo with unshrouded gaze
Guide me through the starry maze,
Upon wings that never tire,
Up to the Heaven of Heavens, and higher and ever higher?
If this be so,
Quick let me go!
But ah! pale spectre, paler still you grow.
You would but lure me to the other bank,
To find it blank!
Of all we loved, not one hath e'er come back
To beckon us along the track,
To point the way, to indicate the goal,
And hold out steadying arms to help the tottering soul.

VII.

But wilt thou make this compact with me, Death,
And keep thy bond?
That even if mine be but borrowed breath,
Lent here awhile, to be reclaimed beyond,
And its poor husk be dug into the ground;
Then, though the Future may not find my face,
Nor arms that love me round my neck be wound,
Fair lips that lisp not yet my name shall sound,
And hearts that beat not yet be my warm dwelling-place;
That under trees which have no rootlets now,
But will then be trunk and bough
And dome of sheltering leaves, sometimes
A tender tear shall fall upon my rhymes;
And hearts at secret war with life,
Or dreaming maid or disillusioned wife,
Shall my persuasive music bless,
Shall call me comforter in their distress,
And make me live again in sorrowing loveliness.

VIII.

So unto Death I do commend my Spirit,
And Time which is in league with Death, that they

May hold in trust, and see my kin inherit,
  All of me that is not clay;
  Embalm my voice and keep it from decay.
  Then I will not ask to stay;—
Nay, rather start at once upon the way:
Cheered by the faith that, at our mortal birth,
  For some high reason beyond Reason's ken,
We are put out to nurse on this strange earth,
  Until Death comes to take us home again.

A DEFENCE OF ENGLISH SPRING.

That is the artificial springtide of our imitative Northern poets. Strange that till the present century hardly any English versifier —save Shakespeare, in a stray note or two—ever ventured to put on paper the real features of our warping English March or of our fickle English April. The calendar of our poets, especially as regards spring, is borrowed, or was borrowed till the end of the eighteenth century, not from the daily reports of the Meteorological Office—pardon the obvious anachronism—but from the "classical" calendar of Virgil and Theocritus. Stranger still that the absurd defiance of plain observation thus introduced should have infected even the vocabulary and the stock phrases of everyday life, so that we talk to-day of a "perpetual spring" as the ideal of a perfect climate: whereas if we ever thought of what we were saying (which we don't do) we would certainly talk instead of a perpetual summer. The common expression is correct enough in the mouth of a South European, for whom spring is the delightful middle breathing space between the draughty chilliness of open winter and the sweltering aridity of high August noontide; but it is simply ridiculous on the alien lips of the remote Hyperborean Briton. Nobody who took his language and his ideas direct from nature could ever dream of holding up as the model of a delicious climate that alternation of swirling, dusty nor'-easters and boisterous, drenching sou'-westers which we in England recognise as spring.—*Pall Mall Gazette*, April 5, 1883.

UNNAMED, unknown, but surely bred
Where Thames, once silver, now runs lead,
Whose journeys daily ebb and flow
'Twixt Tyburn and the bells of Bow,
You late in learnëd prose have told
How, for the happy bards of old,
Spring burst upon Sicilian seas,
Or blossomed 'mong the Cyclades,
But never yet hath deigned to smile
On poets of this shivering isle,
Who, when to vernal strains they melt,
Discourse of joys they never felt,
And, pilfering from each other's page,
Pass on the lie from age to age.

Well, now in turn give ear to me,
Who, with your leave, friend, claim to be,
Degenerate, but withal allied,
At least on mother Nature's side,
To Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, all,
Foremost or hindmost, great or small,
My kindred, and whose numbers ring
With woodnotes of the English Spring:

Leave for awhile your polished town,
Unto my rural home come down,
Where you shall find such bed and board
As rude bucolic roofs afford,
And judge, with your own ear and eye,
If Spring exists, or poets lie.

Welcome! Now plunge at once with me
Into the nearest copse you see.
The boles are brown, the branches gray,
Yet green buds live on every spray.
But 'tis the ground most wins your gaze,
And makes you question, with amaze,
What these are! Shells flung far and wide
By Winter's now fast-ebbing tide,
In language called, for him who sees
But grossly, wood-anemones.
Those, too? Nay, pluck not. You will find
That they maintain a silent mind.
You do not understand? I meant
They will not talk to you in scent.
Sweet violets you know; but these
Have their own rustic way to please.

Their charm is in their look, their free
Unfrightened gaze of gaiety.
Are they not everywhere? Their eyes
Glance up to the cerulean skies,
And challenge them to match the glow
Of their own bluer heaven below!
Anon the trunks and boughs fall back,
And along winding track on track,
Lo! wheresoe'er you onward press,
Shine milky ways of primroses;
So thick, there are, when these have birth,
Far fewer stars in heaven than earth.
You know them, for their face one meets
Still smiling in your London streets;
And one I loved, but who with Fame
Sleeps quiet now, hath made their name,
Even for those, alas! who share
No fellowship with woodlands fair,
Wherever English speech is heard,
A meaning sound, a grateful word.
Yet unto me they seem, when there,
Like young things that should be else-
where,
In lanes, in dells, in rustic air.

But looked on here, where they have space
To peep from every sheltered place,
Their simple, open faces seem—
Or doth again a poet dream?—
The wondering soul of child-like Spring,
Inquisitive of everything.

Now frowns the sky, the air bites bleak,
The young boughs rock, the old trunks creak,
And fast before the following gale
Come slanting drops, then slashing hail,
As keen as sword, as thick as shot.
Nay, do not cower, but heed them not!
For these one neither flies nor stirs;
They are but April skirmishers,
Thrown out to cover the advance
Of gleaming spear and glittering lance,
With which the sunshine scours amain
Heaven, earth, and air, and routs the rain.
See how the sparkling branches sway,
And, laughing, shake the drops away,
While, glimmering through, the meads beyond
Are emerald and diamond.

And hark! behind baptismal shower,
Whose drops, new-poured on leaf and
flower,
Unto their infant faces cling,
The cuckoo, sponsor of the Spring,
Breaks in, and strives, with loud acclaim,
To christen it with his own name.
Now he begins, he will not cease,
Nor leave the woodlands any peace,
That have to listen all day long
To him reciting his one song.
And oft you may, when all is still,
And night lies smooth on vale and hill,
Hear him call "Cuckoo!" in his dream,
Still haunted by the egoist theme.

Out of the wood now, and we gain,
The freedom of the winding lane:
Push through the open gap, and leap;
What! have you tumbled all aheap?
Only a scratch. See! ditch and bank
With the same flowers are lush and rank,
With more beside. As yet but single,
The bluebells with the grasses mingle;

But soon their azure will be scrolled
Upon the primrose cloth-of-gold.
Yes, those are early lady-smocks,
The children crumple in their frocks,
And carry many a zigzag mile,
O'er meadow, footpath, gate, and stile,
To stick in pots and jugs to dress
Their cottage sills and lattices.
As yet they only fleck the grass;
But again hither shortly pass,
And with them knolls that now are bare
Will be a blaze of lavender.
What lends yon dingle such a sheen?
How! Buttercups? No, celandine.
Complete in its own self, each one
A looking-glass is for the sun,
Soon as his waking hours begin,
To see his own effulgence in.
Crave you for brighter still, behold
Yon clusters of marsh-marigold.
This is our rustic wealth, and found
Not under, but above the ground;
Mines that bring wealth without its sting,
Enrich without impoverishing.

Yes, Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo! still!
Do you not feel an impulse thrill
Your vernal blood to do the same,
And, boylike, shout him back his name?
But though he loudest, longest sings,
Music is shook from myriad wings.
Hear you the lark advancing now,
Through seas of air, with rippling prow?
They say that from the poet's tears
Spring sweetest songs for unseen ears;
And from its moist and lowly bed,
The lark mounts up aloft to shed,
In heavenly fields beyond our view,
Music still drenched with earthly dew.
The robin, that in winter cheers
With his lone voice our lonelier ears,
Though warbling still on neighbouring bough,
Sings all unheard, unnoticed now.
Chatter the jays, the starlings flute,
There's not a single throat that's mute.
From tree to tree the finches flit,
Nor once their carols intermit.
The willow-warbler mounts, then drops,
And in his silvery solo stops

Just as it bubbles to the brim,
To hark if any answer him.
High on a bare conspicuous spray,
That none may doubt who chants the lay,
Proud of his undisputed skill
To breast whatever note he will,
The thrush runs revelling all along
The spacious gamut of his song;
Varies, inverts, repeats the strain,
Then sings it different again.
The blackbird, less expert than he,
Coaxes and scolds alternately;
Then, with a sudden scream and rush,
Is off into another bush,
Feigning to fear for life and limb,
Though none have interfered with him.
But listen! ne'er on urban bough
Was perched the note you caught just now.
Hush! move a little down the lane;
When we have passed, he'll start again.
There! Did you ever hear a strain
Of such apotheosized pain,
Such sadness almost sung to bliss,
Blending of woe and joy like this?

Yes, he descants all day, despite
The name he borrows from the night.
Though then perchance the wails increase,
When doth true anguish ever cease?
He is the poet-bird that sings
Through joy, through sorrow, through all things.
'Tis only we that do not hark
Until our own bright days grow dark.

Now, think you that I gleaned all this,
This mite of wisdom, wealth of bliss,
In dusty shelf and yellowing tome?
Is it not rather that I roam,
From dawn to noon, from noon till eve,
Ready to gladden or to grieve
With every aspect, impulse, mood,
Of Nature's active solitude?
Ah! if you knew the hours on hours
One lives with birds, one spends with flowers;
How many a time one's eyes grow wet
By gazing on the violet;
How often all one has to show
For days that come, and days that go,
Are woodland nosegays all ablow;

You then, I think, would scarcely deem
One's songs of Spring a borrowed theme,
But own that English poets learn,
In every hour, at every turn,
From Nature's page, from Nature's speech,
What neither book nor bard can teach.
Nor deem this pride. I am to her
But a poor lame interpreter,
Labouring to read what meanings lurk
In her unlettered handiwork,
Some helpful human gloss to put
On buds that open, flowers that shut;
Some balm extract for weeping eyes
From nights that end, from dew that
dries;
To glean from her uncertain text
A hopeful creed for souls perplexed,
To them her busy calm impart,
And harmonise the human heart.

Halt we a little here, and gaze.
Gambol the lambs, their mothers graze,
While cloudland shadows o'er the grass
In noiseless billows break and pass.

Beholding these, would you not say
The world was born but yesterday?
And while the years such scenes unfold
Afresh, it never can grow old.
Yon yeanlings, by their dam's warm
    fleece,
Fixed image of ephemeral peace,
How cunningly and snug they cower
From driving gust and drenching shower.
One symbol more, for me at least,
Who, let the world blow north or east,
By mother Nature once reclined,
Am sheltered from each bitter wind.

Yet deeper lessons may we read
In this unacademic mead:
The wisdom of untutored sense,
Sagacity of reverence.
See! the lambs kneel, that they may tug
The better from their mother's dug.
And if from Nature's lavish breast
We would imbibe the fullest, best,
All that she is so prompt to give,
That we may learn, that we may live,

Howe'er you proud town-sceptics view it,
We too must bend our knees to do it.

Confess this is not bookish lore;
'Tis feeling only, and no more.
Poets lack what you learning call,
And rustic poets, most of all.
Why from the plain truth should I shrink?
In woods men feel; in towns they think.
Yet, which is best? Thought, stumbling,
plods
Past fallen temples, vanished gods,
Altars unincensed, fanes undecked,
Eternal systems flown or wrecked;
Through trackless centuries that grant
To the poor trudge refreshment scant,
Age after age, pants on to find
A melting mirage of the mind.
But feeling never wanders far,
Content to fare with things that are,—
The same old track, the same loved face,
Familiar genius of the place;
From nature's simples to distil
Homely receipt for homely ill;

And finds, betwixt the sky and ground,
The sunshine of its daily round.
So swallows, though awhile they range
In quest of joy, in chase of change,
Once tenderer instincts flood their
breast,
And twittering voices brim the nest,
Grown far too wise and well to roam,
Keep circling round the roof of home.

Now understand you, friend, why here
I linger passive all the year,
And let old thoughts and feelings gain
Their growth, like lichen, on my brain?—
Why the loud gusts of blame and praise,
That blow about your London ways,
To me are but as wind that shrills
About my orchard daffodils,
Only to make them shake their scent
Unto a wider continent!
But ere you go, if go you must,
Take this from me, at least, on trust.
In that fair tract 'twixt hill and main,
I sang of in my earliest strain,

Where fades not flower, nor falls the leaf,
And Godfrid brought Olympia grief,
Oft have I heard, as Spring comes round,
The snow-fed streams begin to sound;
Oft have I seen the almonds bloom
Round Dante's cradle, Petrarch's tomb;
Been there when banksia roses fall
In cataracts over Tuscan wall;
Oft watched Rome's dead Campagna
 break
To asphodels for April's sake;
Smelt the green myrtle browsed and left
By clambering goats in Ischian cleft;
Gathered the cistus-blooms that lay,
Like flecks of fresh unmelted spray,
Round Paleocastrizza's bay;
Drunk of the nectar wafted o'er
The wave from Zante's perfumed shore;
Plucked Delphi's flowering bays that twine
No garlands now for brows divine;
Stretched me on Acro-Corinth's brow,
Just when the year was young as now;
Have half-way up Hymettus heard
In Attic grove the Attic bird;

Sailed past the crimson Judas-trees
That flame o'er Stamboul's narrow seas,
And harked the cuckoo, from the shore,
Bid wintry Danube thaw once more.
But none of these, nor all, can match,
At least for him who loves to watch
The wild-flowers come, hear wild birds sing,
The rapture of an English Spring.
With us it loiters more than where
It comes, it goes, half unaware;
Makes winter short, makes summer long,
In autumn half renews its song,
Nor even then doth hence depart,
But hybernates within my heart.

HENRY BARTLE EDWARD FRERE.

BORN A.D. 1815. DIED A.D. 1884.

I.

BEND down and read—the birth, the death, the name.
Born in the year that Waterloo was won,
And died in this, whose days are not yet run,
But which, because a year conceived in shame,
No noble need will christen or will claim.
And yet this dead man, England, was Thy son,
And at his grave we ask what had he done,
Bred to be famous, to be foiled of Fame.
Be the reply his epitaph: That he,
In years as youth, the unyielding spirit bore
He got from Thee, but Thou hast got no more;
And that it is a bane and bar to be
A child of Thine, now the adventurous sea
All vainly beckons to a shrinking shore.

II.

Therefore, great soul, within your marble bed
Sleep sound, nor hear the useless tears we weep.
Why should you wake, when England is asleep,
Or care to live, since England now is dead?
Forbidden are the steeps where Glory led;
No more from furrowed danger of the deep
We harvest greatness; to our hearths we creep,
Count and recount our coin, and nurse our dread.
The sophist's craft hath grown a prosperous trade,
And womanish Tribunes hush the manly drum:
The very fear of Empire strikes us numb,
Fumbling with pens, who once had flashed the blade.
Therefore, great soul, sleep sound where you are laid,
Blest in being deaf when Honour now is dumb.

NATURE AND THE BOOK.

I.

I CLOSED the book. The summer shower
In smiling dimples ebbed away,
But still on leaf, and blade, and flower,
The fallen raindrops glistening lay.

II.

I placed the volume on the shelf,
And, issuing from the leafy shed,
Paced the moist garden by myself,
Musing on what I just had read:

III.

That Man should live by Nature's laws,
And that his ways are waste and wild,
Unless he follow where she draws,
Cling to her skirts, and be her child:

IV.

That love, and dread, and doubt are dreams,
But dwindling specks in widening space,
Nor shall we ever pierce what seems,
Or find a soul behind the face:

V.

That if man will but ask the air,
Question the earth, consult the skies,
He needs no help of awe or prayer,
Or further wisdom, to be wise.

VI.

The sun had dried the garden seat;
The tall lithe flax nor bent nor swayed;
The tassels of the lime smelt sweet
Within the circle of its shade.

VII.

The heavy bees from out the hive
Came slowly answering to the sun;
I watched them hover, and then dive
Into the foxgloves, one by one.

VIII.

Shortly a butcher-bird shot by,
Then doubled back, and upward flew,
Chasing a sulphur butterfly
To whom the earth and air were new.

IX.

Oft it escaped—escaped again,—
But, each time, feebler swerved and rose ;
Till flagged the flying flower, and then
I saw not, but could guess, the close.

X.

Anon a hawk, intent to strike,
In the blue ether hovering brown,
Flickered an instant, and, then like
Returning arrow, quickened down.

XI.

What ! Has he missed ? No, bravely done !
A whirr of wings, a silenced shriek.
Off skimmed the covey—all save one,
Left in tight claw and rending beak.

XII.

And are these then the laws that I
Must copy with a docile will?
Am I to suck each sweetness dry?
Am I to harry and to kill?

XIII.

If Nature is to be my guide,
I doubt her fitness for the part,
Rebuke her ruthlessness, and chide
Her lack of soul, her want of heart.

XIV.

I chafe within the cage of law;
The realm of chance far sweeter is.
I own no love, I feel no awe,
For causes and for sequences.

XV.

Doth Nature draw me, 'tis because,
Unto my seeming, there doth lurk
A lawlessness about her laws,
More mood than purpose in her work.

XVI.

The Spring-time will not come to date;
Winds, clouds, and frosts, man's reckoning mar.
For bud and bloom you have to wait,
Despite your ordered calendar.

XVII.

If Nature built by rule and square,
Than man what wiser would she be?
What wins us is her careless care,
And sweet unpunctuality.

XVIII.

They misconstrue her, who translate.
They blur her mirror with their mist.
"Behold," one says, "the face of Fate,"
Because himself a fatalist.

XIX.

Another, coming, cries "Behold
The aspect of a veering will!
The Gods are weak, the Gods are old"—
Fools! you are older, weaker still.

XX.

In vain would science scan and trace
Firmly her aspect. All the while,
There gleams upon her far-off face
A vague unfathomable smile.

XXI.

Only the poet reads her right,
Because he reads with heart, not eyes:
He bares his being in her sight,
And mirrors all her mysteries.

XXII.

While others scan some favourite part
Of Nature, he reflects the whole,
Has every climate in his heart,
And all the seasons in his soul.

XXIII.

While she upon herself revolves,
He only her whole sphere can see,
And in that prism, his mind, resolves
The fragments of her unity.

XXIV.

He bids her not to him conform,
He does not question her intent;
He takes the sunshine and the storm
As strings of some sweet instrument;

XXV.

And out of these, and every mood
That in her lurks, makes music flow,
And fledges Fancy's happy brood
E'en from the very nest of woe.

XXVI.

He loves her, hence doth not demand
That she be better or be worse,
But links with his her helpful hand,
And weds her beauty to his verse:

XXVII.

He loves her more, as grow the years;
Her faults are virtues in his eyes;
He drinks, with her, Spring's wayward tears,
With her, shares Winter's wasted sighs.

XXVIII.

She waited for him till he came;
Though he departs, she doth survive,
And, fondly careful of his fame,
Through hers she keeps his name alive.

XXIX.

From sunny woof and cloudy weft
Fell rain in sheets; so, to myself
I hummed these hazard rhymes, and left
The learnëd volume on the shelf.

DEAD!

I.

HUSH! or you'll wake her. Softly tread!
She slumbers in her little bed.
What do I see? A coffin! Dead?
Yes, dead at break of morning.

II.

No, no, it cannot, cannot be!
I know that I can wake her. See!
She only plays at sleep. *Ma mie,*
Kiss me, for it is morning.

III.

Look, pretty, look! Within, without,
Snowdrops and hyacinths lie about.
Why don't you clutch them with a shout
Blither than birds of morning?

IV.

You used to clap your hands with glee,
When I brought flowers. "Are these for me?"
Now, now, you neither scent nor see
These incense-buds of morning.

V.

Do you not know me, pet? Speak! speak!
There is no answer in her cheek.
To find her now where shall I seek?—
Seek in the vanished morning!

VI.

What can I do to make her heed?
I am crying, love; I am indeed.
Open your eyes and see. What need
To tease me all the morning?

VII.

Look! We will sally forth and play.
Ramble, and never ask our way,
Lessons and tasks all put away
As though it were not morning.

VIII.

We will do all that you desire,
And I will never, never tire
Of romping with you by the fire,
When 'tis no longer morning.

IX.

Your favourite tales, oft told before,
I'll tell you, darling, o'er and o'er ;
It never shall be bedtime more,
Will you but wake this morning.

X.

I will not ask you to sit still ;
You shall be naughty when you will ;
Shall spill my ink and spoil my quill,
And squander all my morning.

XI.

Alas ! Alas ! it is no cheat :
Quiet she lies from face to feet !
No smile, no sigh, no hue, no heat,
No earnest of the morning.

XII.

Draw high the sheet above her head.
She liked it, so. Dead? No, not dead.
The angels, hovering round her bed,
Will greet her in the morning.

IMPROMPTU.

(On a Miniature, in the possession of Lady Wolseley, of a Beautiful Lady, painted after death, as though she were still alive.)

I.

Tell me your race, your name,
O Lady limned as dead, yet as when living fair!
That within this faded frame
An unfading beauty wear.
Were you ever known to fame,
Or, more wisely, chose to be
Lost in love's obscurity?
We may question, gaze, and guess,
You will never answer "yes,"
For your sweet lips are closed by Death's relentlessness.

II.

Yes, you were chill before
Some thoughtful hand to us your loveliness bequeathed.

You already then no more
Moved, or spoke, or felt, or breathed,
But an eternal silence wore.
Dank and limp your ample hair,
And your eyelids kept the stare
Of a face that cannot speak;
And where lived the rose's streak,
There only lingered then the lily in your cheek.

III.

Was it your own strange prayer
That you, in death, should be in living garb arrayed,
And your aspect seem as fair,
Fanciful and undecayed,
As when life and love were there?
No! it was no idle whim:
Death was in love with you, and you in love with Him.
And when you, with tender dread,
All to Him surrenderëd,
He took care you should retain
All of life except its pain,
And with unabated charms
Lie fast asleep in your unsleeping lover's arms.

AT SAN GIOVANNI DEL LAGO.

I.

I LEANED upon the rustic bridge,
  And watched the streamlet make
Its chattering way past zigzag ridge
  Down to the silent lake.

II.

The sunlight flickered on the wave,
  Lay quiet on the hill;
Italian sunshine, bright and brave,
  Though 'twas but April still.

III.

I heard the distant shepherd's shout,
  I heard the fisher's call;
The lizards glistened in and out,
  Along the crannied wall.

IV.

Hard-by, in rudely frescoed niche,
Hung Christ upon the tree;
Round Him the Maries knelt, and each
Was weeping bitterly.

V.

A nightingale from out the trees
Rippled, and then was dumb;
But in the golden bays the bees
Kept up a constant hum.

VI.

Two peasant women of the land,
Barefoot, with tresses black,
Came slowly toward me from the strand,
With their burdens on their back:

VII.

Two wicker crates with linen piled,
Just newly washed and wrung;
And, close behind, a little child
That made the morning young.

VIII.

Reaching the bridge, each doffed her load,
And propped it on the ground,
Resting ere up the mountain road
On to their home they wound.

IX.

Shortly the child, just half its height,
Stooped neath her mother's pack,
And strove and strove with all her might
To lift it on her back.

X.

Thereat my heart began to smile:
Haply I speak their tongue:
"Can you," I said, "not wait awhile?
You won't be always young.

XI.

"Why long to share the toil you see,
Why hurry on the years,
When life will one long season be
Of labour and of tears?

XII.

"Be patient with your childhood. Work
Will come full soon enough.
From year to year, from morn till murk,
Life will be hard and rough.

XIII.

"And yours will grow, and haply I,
Revisiting this shore,
In years to come will see and sigh
You are a child no more.

XIV.

"Yours then will be the moil, the heat,
Yours be the strain and stress.
Pray Heaven Love then attend your feet
To make life's burden less."

XV.

Thus as I spoke, with steadfast stare
She clung between the two,
Scarce understanding, yet aware
That the sad words were true.

XVI.

Down from the mother's face a tear
Fell to her naked feet.
"But now unto the Signor, dear,
Your poesy repeat."

XVII.

Without demur the little maid
Spread out her palms, and lo!
From lips that lisped, yet unafraid,
Sweet verse began to flow.

XVIII.

She told the story that we all
Learn at our mother's knee,
Of Eve's transgression, Adam's fall,
And Heaven's great clemency:

XIX.

How Jesus was by Mary's hands
In the rough manger laid,
And how rich Kings from far-off lands
Their pious homage paid:

XX.

Then how, though cruel Herod slew
The suckling babes, and thought
To baffle God, Christ lived and grew,
And in the temple taught.

XXI.

She raised her hands to suit the rhyme,
She clasped them on her heart;
There never lived the city mime
So well had played the part.

XXII.

When she broke off, I was too choked
With tenderness to speak,
And so her little form I stroked,
And kissed her on the cheek;

XXIII.

And took a sweetmeat that I had,
And put it in her mouth.
O then she danced like a stream that's glad
When it hurries to the south.

XXIV.

She danced, she skipped, she kissed "good-bye,"
She frolicked round and round:
The pair resumed their packs, and I
Sate rooted to the ground.

XXV.

"*A rivederla!*" Then the three
Went winding up the hill.
Ah! they have long forgotten me;
But I remember still.

BELLAGIO.

A CAPTIVE THROSTLE.

Poor little mite with mottled breast,
Half-fledged, and fallen from the nest,
For whom this world hath just begun,
Who want to fly, yet scarce can run;
Why open wide your yellow beak?
Is it for hunger, or to speak—
To tell me that you fain would be
Loosed from my hand to liberty?

Well, you yourself decide your fate,
But be not too precipitate.
Which will you have? If you agree
To quit the lanes, and lodge with me,
I promise you a bed more soft,
Even than that where you aloft
First opened wondering eyes, and found
A world of green leaves all around.
When you awake, you straight shall see
A fresh turf, green and velvety,

Well of clear water, sifted seed,
All things, in short, that bird can need;
And gentle beings, far more fair
Than build on bough, or skim through air,
When all without is wet and bleak,
Laying against your cage their cheek,
To make you pipe shall coax and coo,
And bud their pretty lips at you.
And when the clammy winter rain
Drips from the roof and clouds the pane,
When windows creak and chimneys roar,
And beggars wail outside the door,
And stretch out fingers lank and thin,
You shall be safely housed within,
And through the wood-fire's flickering glow
Watch drifting leaves or driving snow,
Till Marian pulls the shutters up,
And you go sleep, and I go sup.

But now suppose I let you go,
To rains that beat, to winds that blow,
To heedless chance and prowling foe?
Mayhap this very day, alas!
You will be drowned in tangled grass:

Or, that escaped, some slinking stoat
May seize and suck your speckled throat;
Or hawk slow wheeling in the sky
Your fluttering feeble wings descry,
And, straightway downward flashing
thence,
Relish and rend your innocence.
Should you survive, and glad and strong
Make autumn spring-like with your song,
You will be lured, the very first,
Where netted berries bulge and burst,
And, by their guardian caught alive,
You may, before I can arrive
To bid him not be so unsparing,
Have paid the forfeit of your daring.
Time too will come, there will not be
Berry on bush, or pod on tree,
Stripped be the hawthorn, bare the holly,
And all the boughs drip melancholy;
And you will have to scrape for food
Amid a frosty solitude.

Which shall it be? Now quick decide!
Safety confined, or peril wide?

Then did the little bird reply:
"'Tis true, as yet I scarce can fly;
But oh! it is such joy to try!
Just as you came, I was beginning
To win my wings, exult in winning;
To feel the promptings of the pinion,
The dawn of a divine dominion
Over the empty air, and over
Fields of young wheat and breadths of
clover,
Pledge of a power to scale, some day,
My native elm-tree's topmost spray,
And mid the leaves and branches warm
Sing far beyond the reach of harm.
And shall I barter gift like this
For doled-out joy and measured bliss?
For a trim couch and dainty fare
Forfeit the freedom of the air?
Shall I exchange for punctual food
April's sweet loves and summer's brood;
The dewy nest 'neath twinkling stars
For crushing roof and cramping bars?
No! Come what chance or foe that may,
Menace of death this very day,

The weasel's clutch, the falcon's swoop—
What if these kill? they do not coop.
Autumn's worst ambush, winter's rage,
Are sweeter than the safest cage."

Off, little mite! I let you fly,
And do as I would be done by.

Nature within your heart hath sown
A wisdom wiser than my own,
And from your choice I learn to prize
The birth-right of unbounded skies,
Delightful danger of being free,
Sweet sense of insecurity;
The privilege to risk one's all
On being nor captive, caged, nor thrall,
The wish to range, the wing to soar
Past space behind, through space before,
The ecstasy of unknown flight,
The doubt, the danger, the delight,
To range and roam, unchained, unvext,
Nor know what worlds will open next;
And since Death waits both caged and free,
To die, at least, of liberty.

LOVE'S FITFULNESS.

You say that I am fitful. Sweet, 'tis true;
But 'tis that I your fitfulness obey.
If you are April, how can I be May,
Or flaunt bright roses when you wear sad rue?
Shine like the sun, and *my* sky will be blue;
Sing, and the lark shall envy me my lay:
I do but follow where you point the way,
And what I feel you doing, straight must do.
The wind might just as well reproach the vane,
As you upbraid me for my shiftings, dear:
Blow from the south, and south I shall remain;
If you keep fixed, be sure I shall not veer.
Nay, on your change my changes so depend,
If ends your love, why then my love must end.

A TE DEUM.

I.

Now let me praise the Lord,
The Lord, the Maker of all!
I will praise Him on timbrel and chord;
Will praise Him, whatever befall.

II.

For the Heavens are His, and the Earth,
His are the wind and the wave;
His the begetting, the birth,
And His the jaws of the grave.

III.

'Tis He that hath made us, not we;
We were dust and slime of the ground:
He breathed on the dark, and we see;
He flooded the silence with sound.

IV.

Shall I pick and choose for His praise?
Shall I thank Him for good, not ill?
He is the Ancient of Days,
And He hews the rocks as He will.

V.

So I praise Thee, O Lord, for the good,
For the ill, for the weal, for the woe,
For the cushat that coos in the wood,
And the wolves that howl in the snow.

VI.

For the close-fitting doors that are barred,
Lest the vagrant should whine for bread,
And the yawn of the slinking pard
That hath gorged and surfeited.

VII.

For the owl that jibbers and blinks
In the arches the Flavian planned,
And the stare of the stony Sphynx
O'er the ribs of the fleshless sand.

VIII.

What is there Thou hast done,
I will not thank for and praise?
Thanks for the sands that are run,
Thanks for the unborn days.

IX.

For the stealthy mildew and blight
That shows on the mellowing corn,
And the bankrupt that wakes at night
And weeps o'er the day he was born.

X.

For the fears and the years that are null,
And the hopes Thou dost bring to nought,
And the worm-thridden ways of the skull
In which Shakespeare thought.

XI.

How shall I thank Thee, O Lord!
For Thy infinite ways and deeds?
For the edge of the cleaving sword,
And the neigh of riderless steeds:

XII.

The murderous glitter and tramp,
And the lives that are mown like grain,
The cheers of the victors' camp,
And the clammy sleep of the slain.

XIII.

The laurels and loves that await
The Hero returned from the strife,
And the widows that stand at the gate
Loveless and lonely for life.

XIV.

Thanks for all things that are,
For the fair, the foul, the fell;
Thanks for the Morning-star,
And the nethermost murk of Hell.

XV.

For the music of moonlight nights,
And the savour of summer days,
For the swoop of carrion kites,
And the stench of gibbeted jays.

XVI.

The soft ripples that laugh in the bay,
The soft shadows that sweep o'er the moor,
And the plunge of the tides at their prey
When they level the homes of the poor.

XVII.

Lift up your throats, ye waves!
Swell out your voice, ye hills!
Thank for the chance that saves;
Thank for the flash that kills.

XVIII.

For the bliss of a dewy dell
When lover and maiden meet,
And the venal kisses they sell
In the shade of the lamp-lit street.

XIX.

For the tumult of hopes and fears
When the bridegroom steals to his bride,
And the coldness born of the years,
Though they still lie side by side.

XX.

Praise we, praise we the Lord,
  The Lord, the Maker of all!
Praise Him on timbrel and chord;
  Praise Him, whatever befall!

AT DELPHI.

I.

Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

II.

Where hast thou, Apollo, gone?
I have wandered on and on,
Through the shaggy Dorian gorges,
Down from where Parnassus forges
Thunder for the Phocian valleys;
Where the Pleistus springs and sallies
Past ravines and caverns dread,
Have, like it, meanderëd;
But I cannot see thee, hear thee,
Find thee, feel thee, get anear thee.
Though in quest of thee I go where
Thou didst haunt, I find thee nowhere,
Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

III.

Still no answer comes. . . . Apollo!
Vainly do I call and holloa
Into each Crissœan cleft
Where the last year's leaves are left,
Deem not I have pushed my way
But from stony Amphissà.
I have come from far-off land,
Traversed foam, traversed sand,
From green pastures sea-surrounded,
Where thy phorminx never sounded;
O'er the broad and barren acres
Of the vainly furrowed breakers,
Across mountains loftier far
Than the peaks of Pindus are;
Skirted groves of pine and fir
Denser than lone Tempe's were,
With no selfish tread, but only
I might find thee, lovely, lonely,
Lingering by thy sacred city;
On me wilt thou not have pity?
Sun-god! Song-god! I implore thee!
Glow, and let me pale before thee,
Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

IV.

Fallen tablet, prostrate column,
Solitude and silence solemn!
Half-tilled patches, squalid hovels,
Where life multiplies and grovels—
Is this Delphi, this the shrine
Of the Musagete divine?
This the cavern, this the cell,
Of the Pythian oracle!
Where the tripod, where the altar,
Incense, embassy, and psalter?
Can this pool of cresses be
Cradle of pure Castaly?
From the rock though still it bubbles,
Travels onwards, halts, and doubles,
Where the Muses wont to lave
Limbs as vestal as its wave,
'Mong the flashing waters flashing,—
Gaunt and withered crones are washing.
Not a note of lyre or zittern,
But, below, the booming bittern
Waits his quarry to inveigle,
While o'erhead the silent eagle,

Blinking, stares at the blank sun—
All of thee that is not gone,
Apollo! Apollo!

VI.

Who art thou, intruder weird!
With the fine and flowing beard?
Whom no snowy robes encumber,
But a habit black and sombre,
Yet in whose composëd eyes
Lurks the light of mysteries.
Priest thou seemest, but not one
Of the loved Latona's son.
In thy aspect is no gladness,
Glance nor gleam of joyous madness,
Only gloom, only sadness.
Underneath thy knotted girdle
Thoughts congeal and passions curdle,
And about thy brow ascetic
Lives nor light nor line prophetic.
Priest, but priest not of Apollo,
Whither wouldst thou have me follow?
Lead but onward, I will enter
Where thy cold gaze seems to centre,

Underneath yon portal dismal,
Into dusk and chill abysmal.
Hast thou pent him? Is He lying
There within, dethroned and dying?
If thou breathest, hear me crying,
"Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!"

VI.

No, but here He cannot be,
God of light and poesy!
What are these I see around,
Gloomy upon gloomy ground,
Making walls and roof to seem
Sepulchre of morbid dream?
Visages with aspect stony,
Bodies lean, and lank, and bony,
In whose lineaments I trace
Neither love, nor joy, nor grace:
Youth with limbs disused and old,
Maidens pale, contorted, cold,
Flames devouring, pincers wrenching
Muscles naked but unblenching,
Writhing snakes forked venom darting
Into flesh-wounds, gaping, smarting,

Furies shagged with tresses fell,
Ghouls and ghosts of nether hell!
Priest of beauty! Priest of song!
Aid me, if thou still art strong!
See me! save me! bear me whither
Glows thy light that brought me hither,
Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!

VII.

O the sunshine once again!
O to stand a man 'mong men!
Lo! the horrid nightmare pales
In the light of flowing vales,
In the gaze of steadfast mountains,
Sidelong runnels, forward fountains,
Spacious sky, receding air,
Breadth and bounty everywhere.
What if all the gods be dead,
Nature reigneth in their stead.
Let me dream the noon away
Underneath this full-blown bay,
Where the yellow bees are busy,
Till they stagger, drowsy, dizzy,

From the honeyed wine that wells
Up the branches to the cells
Of the myriad-clustered flowers
Dropping golden flakes in showers.
Here reclined, I will surrender
Sense and soul unto the tender
Mingling of remote and close:
Gods voluptuous, gods morose;
Altars at whose marble meet
Downcast eyes and dancing feet;
Awful dirges, glad carouse,
Unveiled bosoms, shaded brows,
Wreathëd steer and tonsured skull,
Shapes austere with beautiful;
Till the past and present swim
In an ether distant, dim,
And the Delphic fumes rise denser
From a silver-swinging censer,
And in one harmonious dream,
Through a heavenly nimbus, gleam
Lovely limbs and longings saintly,
And pale virgins murmur faintly,
"Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!"

VIII.

Priest, but priest not of Apollo,
Why dost thou my footsteps follow
From the deep dark shrine down there
To this temple of the air?
What, profaner! wouldst thou lay
Hands upon the sacred bay,
Tearing Daphne limb from limb!
Hast thou, then, no dread of Him?
How? For me? Avaunt, and pass!
I am not fool Marsyas.
Stay! Then to my forehead bind it,
Round my temples wreathe and wind it;
'Chance the Avenger then will come,
Haunt and grot no more be dumb,
But the rills and steeps be ringing,
And a long array come singing,
"Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!"

IX.

All in vain! Nor prayer nor taunt
Tempts him back to his loved haunt.
Fretted tablet, fallen column,
Solitude and silence solemn!

He again from Peneus ne'er
Will to Castaly repair;
Never more in cavern dread
Will his oracles be read;
Now I know that Thou art dead,
Apollo!

X.

Then like fountain in mine ear
Spake the god aloud and clear:
"Take it! Wear it! 'Tis for thee,
Singer from the Northern Sea.
If the least, not last of those,
Suckled 'mong the genial snows.
Though the Muses may have left
Tempe's glen and Delphi's cleft,
Wanderer! they have only gone
Hence to murmuring Albion.
Need was none to travel hither:
Child of England, go back thither.
Traverse foam, traverse sand;
Back, and in thy native land
Thou wilt find what thou dost seek.
There the oracles still speak;

There the mounting fumes inspire
Glowing brain and living lyre.
There the Muses prompt the strain,
There they renovate my reign;
There thou wilt not call in vain,
'Apollo! Apollo! Apollo!'

DELPHI, *April* 1881.

A SNOW-WHITE LILY.

I.

THERE was a snow-white lily
Grew by a cottage door:
Such a white and wonderful lily
Never was seen before.

II.

The earth and the ether brought it
Sustenance, raiment, grace,
And the feet of the west wind sought it,
And smiled in its smiling face.

III.

Tall were its leaves and slender,
Slender and tall its stem;
Purity, all its splendour,
Beauty, its diadem.

IV.

Still from the ground it sprouted,
  Statelier year by year,
Till loveliness clung about it,
  And was its atmosphere.

V.

And the fame of this lily was bruited
  'Mong men ever more and more;
They came, and they saw, and uprooted
  Its life from the cottage door.

VI.

For they said, "'Twere shame, 'twere pity,
  It here should dwell half despised.
We must carry it off to the city,
  Where lilies are loved and prized.

VII.

The city was moved to wonder,
  And burst into praise and song,
And the multitude parted asunder
  To gaze on it borne along.

VIII.

Along and aloft 'twas uplifted,
From palace to palace led;
Men vowed 'twas the lily most gifted
Of lilies living or dead.

IX.

And wisdom, and wealth, and power,
Bowed down to it more and more:—
Yet it never was quite the same flower
That bloomed by the cottage door.

X.

For no longer the night-dews wrought it
Raiment, and food, and grace;
Nor the feet of the west wind sought it,
To dance in its dimpling face.

XI.

'Twas pursued by the frivolous rabble,
With poisonous lips and eyes;
They drenched it with prurient babble,
And fed it with fulsome lies.

XII.

Thus into the lily there entered
The taint of the tainted crew,
Till itself in itself grew centred,
And it flattery drank like dew.

XIII.

Then tongues began words to bandy
As to whose might the lily be.
"'Tis mine," said the titled dandy;
Said the plutocrat, "'tis for me."

XIV.

Thus over the lily they wrangled,
Making the beautiful base,
Till its purity seemed all mangled,
And its gracefulness half disgrace.

XV.

Next they who had first enthroned it,
And blatantly hymned its fame,
Now, curdling their smiles, disowned it,
And secretly schemed its shame.

XVI.

The lily began to wither,
Since the world was no longer sweet.
And hands that had brought it thither,
Flung it into the street.

XVII.

A sensitive soul and tender
The flung-away lily found:
He had seen it in hours of splendour,
So he lifted it from the ground.

XVIII.

He carried it back to the garden
Where in olden days it grew,
And he knelt, and prayed for it pardon
From the sun, and the breeze, and the dew.

XIX.

Then the breeze, since it knows no malice,
And the sun that detesteth strife,
And the dew whose abode is the chalice,
Would have coaxed back the lily to life.

XX.

But the lily would not waken,
Nor ever will waken more;
And feet and fame have forsaken
Its place by the cottage door.

A RARE GUEST.

LOVE, that all men think they know,
Is a rare guest here below;
But with mortals when it stays,
These are its unerring ways.

I

Love builds secret, half afraid,
In the covert, in the shade,
Fostering, where none know it is,
Solitary gladnesses.
Pry not on its brooding breast,
Lest it should desert its nest.
Then, all seen, you naught can save;
'Twas a cradle;—'tis a grave.

II.

Love loves tumult closed with rest,
Spreads its wings and bares its breast

To the unrelenting strain
Of the passionate hurricane.
Though its plumes are frayed like foam,
On it presses still for home,
Upward, slowly—onward, fast—
Till, when it descries at last
Tall tops swaying to and fro,
Down it drops to nest below.
Then the wind that rocks the tree
Is to it a lullaby.

III.

Fancy talks itself away,
Love hath ever naught to say,
Save again the hushed caress,
And the sweet long silences,
Glistening gaze of trustful eyes,
Where none questions, none replies;
Like, enraptured with its lot,
Star that shines but speaketh not.

IV.

Men wax rich by thrifty living;
Love is opulent from giving,

Keeps its store from growing less
By unceasing lavishness;
Richest when it squanders all,
Never ruined prodigal.

V.

Lastly, Love, if it could choose,
Would not, as gross worldlings use,
Summon smiles and state to be
Sponsors to felicity.
These it fain would keep apart
From the nuptials of the heart,
Or, if they perforce attend,
Find them rather foe than friend.
For, without the world's disfavour,
Sweet love loses half its savour.

Love, that all men think they know,
Is a rare guest here below;
But with mortals when it stays,
These are its unerring ways.

THE LAST NIGHT.

I.

SISTER, come to the chesnut toll,
And sit with me on the dear old bolè,
Where we oft have sate in the sun and the rain,
And perhaps I never shall sit again.
Longer and darker the shadows grow:
'Tis my last night, dear. With the dawn I go.

II.

O the times, and times, we two have played
Alone, alone, in its nursing shade.
When once we the breadth of the park had crossed,
We fancied ourselves to be hid and lost
In a secret world that seemed to be
As vast as the forests I soon shall see.

III.

Do you remember the winter days
When we piled up the leaves and made them blaze,
While the blue smoke curled, in the frosty air,
Up the great wan trunks that rose gaunt and bare,
And we clapped our hands, and the rotten bough
Came crackling down to our feet, as now?

IV.

But dearer than all was the April weather,
When off we set to the woods together,
And piled up the lap of your clean white frock
With primrose, and bluebell, and ladysmock,
And notched the pith of the sycamore stem
Into whistles. Do you remember them?

V.

And in summer you followed me fast and far—
How cruel and selfish brothers are!—
With tottering legs and with cheeks aflame,
Till back to the chesnut toll we came,
And rested and watched the long tassels swing,
That seemed with their scent to prolong the Spring.

VI.

And in autumn 'twas still our favourite spot,
When school was over and tasks forgot,
And we scampered away and searched till dusk
For the smooth bright nuts in the prickly husk,
And carried them home, by the shepherd's star,
Then roasted them on the nursery bar.

VII.

O, Winnie, I do not want to go
From the dear old home; I love it so.
Why should I follow the sad sea-mew
To a land where everything is new,
Where we never bird-nested, you and I,
Where I was not born, but perhaps shall die?

VIII.

No, I did not mean that. Come, dry your tears.
You may want them all in the coming years.
There's nothing to cry for, Win: be brave.
I will work like a horse, like a dog, like a slave,
And will come back long ere we both are old,
The clods of my clearing turned to gold.

IX.

But could I not stay and work at home,
Clear English woods, turn up English loam?
I shall have to work with my hands out there,
Shear sheep, shoe horses, put edge on share,
Dress scab, drive bullocks, trim hedge, clean ditch,
Put in here a rivet and there a stitch.

X.

It were sweeter to moil in the dear old land,
And sooth why not? Have we grown so grand?
So grand! When the rear becomes the van,
Rich idleness makes the gentleman.
Gentleman! What is a gentleman now?
A swordless hand and a helmless brow.

XI.

Would you blush for me, Win, if you saw me there
With my sleeves turned up and my sinews bare,
And the axe on the log come ringing down
Like a battering-ram on a high-walled town,
And my temples beaded with diamond sweat,
As bright as a wealth-earned coronet?

XII.

And, pray, if not there, why here? Does crime
Depend upon distance, or shame on clime?
Will your sleek-skinned plutocrats cease to scoff
At a workman's hands, if he works far off?
And is theirs the conscience men born to sway
Must accept for their own in this latter day?

XIII.

I could be Harry's woodreeve. Who should scorn
To work for his House, and the eldest-born?
I know every trunk, and bough, and stick,
Much better than Glebe and as well as Dick.
Loving service seems banned in a monied age,
Or a brother's trust might be all my wage.

XIV.

Or his keeper, Win? Do you think I'd mind
Being out in all weathers, wet, frost, or wind?
Because I have got a finer coat,
Do I shrink from a weasel or dread a stoat?
Have I not nailed them by tens and scores
To the pheasant-hutch and the granary doors?

XV.

Don't I know where the partridge love to hatch,
And wouldn't the poachers meet their match?
A hearty word has a wondrous charm,
And, if not—well, there's always the stalwart arm.
Thank Heaven! spite pillows and counterpanes,
The blood of the savage still haunts my veins.

XVI.

They may boast as they will of our moral days,
Our mincing manners and softer ways,
And our money value for everything.
But he who will fight should alone be King;
And when gentlemen go, unless I'm wrong,
Men too will grow scarce before very long.

XVII.

There, enough! let us back. I'm a fool, I know;
But I *must* see Gladys before I go.
Good-bye, old toll. In my log-hut bleak,
I shall hear your leaves whisper, your branches creak,
Your wood-quests brood, your wood-peckers call,
And the shells of your ripened chesnuts fall.

XVIII.

Harry never must let the dear old place
To a stranger's foot and a stranger's face.
He may live as our fathers lived before,
With a homely table and open door.
But out on the pomp the upstart hires,
And that drives a man from the roof of his sires!

XIX.

I never can understand why they
Who founded thrones in a braver day,
Should cope with the heroes of 'change and mart
Whose splendour puts rulers and ruled apart,
Insults the lowly and saps the State,
Makes the servile cringe, and the manly hate.

XX.

You will write to me often, dear, when I'm gone,
And tell me how everything goes on;
If the trout spawn well, where the beagles meet,
Who is married or dies in the village street;
And mind you send me the likeliest pup
Of Fan's next litter. There, Win, cheer up!

FAREWELL TO SPRING.

I.

I SAW this morning, with a sudden smart,
Spring preparing to depart.
I know her well and so I told her all my heart.

II.

"Why did you, Spring, your coming so delay,
If, now here, you cannot stay?
You win my love and then unloving pass away.

III

"We waited, waited, O so long, so long,
Just to hear the ousel's song.
To-morrow t'will be hushed, to-day that is so strong.

IV.

"Day after day, and dawn again on dawn,
Winter's shroud was on the lawn,
So still, so smooth, we thought 'twould never be withdrawn.

V.

"Now that at last your welcome mimic snow
Doth upon the hawthorn blow,
It bides not on the bough, but melts before we know.

VI.

"Scarce hath the primrose o'er the sordid mould
Lavished treasure, than behold!
Our wealth of simple joy is robbed of all its gold.

VII.

"When to the woods we hie with feet of mirth,
Now the hyacinths have birth,
Swiftly the blue of Heaven fades from the face of earth.

VIII.

"You with dry gusts and unrelenting wrack
Kept the liquid cuckoo back.
Now, even ere he goes, he turneth hoarse, alack!

IX.

"When, in the long warm nights of June,
Nightingales have got their tune,
Their sweet woe dies, and we are beggared of the boon.

X.

"First drops the bloom, then darkens the green leaf;
Everything in life is brief,
Save autumn's deepening gloom and winter's changeless grief."

XI.

Then with a smile thus answered me the Spring:
"To my voice and flight you cling,
For I, before I perch, again am on the wing.

XII.

"With you were I the whole year round to stay,
'Twould be you that went away,
Your love made fickle by monotony of May.

XIII.

"Love cannot live save upon love beyond.
Leaving you, I keep you fond,
Not letting you despair, but making you despond.

XIV.

"Farewell, and love me still, my lover dear,
Love me till another year,
And you, if you be true, again will find me here."

XV.

Then darker, deeper, waxed the woods; the ground
Flowerless turned and then embrowned;
And less was of sweet scent, and less was of sweet sound.

XVI.

Mute was the mavis, moulted was the thorn,
Meads were cut, and lambs were shorn,
And I by Spring was left forsaken and forlorn.

XVII.

Forlorn, forsaken, shall I be until
Primrose peep and throstle shrill,
And in the orchard gleam the outriding daffodil.

XVIII.

Then shall I know that Spring among the trees
Hiding is, and that the breeze
Anew will bear abroad odours and melodies.

THE POET AND THE MUSE.

(*The Poet speaks.*)

I.

WHITHER, and whence, and why hast fled?
Thou art dumb, my muse; thou art dumb, thou art
dead,
As a waterless stream, as a leafless tree.
What have I done to banish thee?

II.

But a moon ago, the whole day long
My ears were full of the sound of song;
And still through my darkly silent dreams
Plashed the fitful music of far-off streams.

III.

When the night turned pale and the stars grew dim,
The morning chanted a dewy hymn.
The fragrant languor of cradled noon
Was lulled by the hum of a self-sung tune.

IV.

Joy came on the wings of a jocund lay,
And sorrow in harmony passed away;
And the sunny hours of tideless time
Were buoyed on the surges of rolling rhyme.

V.

The moon went up in a cloudless sky,
Silently but melodiously;
And the glitter of stars and the patter of rain
Were notes and chords of an endless strain.

VI.

And vision, and feeling, and sound, and scent,
Were the strings of a sensitive instrument,
That silently, patiently, watched and waited,
And unto my soul reverberated.

VII.

In the orchard reddens the rounded fruit
'Mid the yellowing leaves, but my voice is mute.
The thinned copse sighs like a heart forsaken,
But not one chord of my soul is shaken.

VIII.

Through the gloaming broadens the harvest moon;
The fagged hind whistles his homeward tune;
The last load creaks up the hamlet hill;
'Tis only my voice, my voice that is still.

(*The Muse answers.*)

I.

Poet, look in your poet's heart.
It will tell you what keepeth us twain apart.
I have not left you; I still am near.
But a music not mine enchants your ear.

II.

Another hath entered and nestles deep
In the lap of your love, like a babe asleep.
You watch her breathing from morn till night;
She is all your hearing and all your sight.

III.

Yet fear not, poet, to do me wrong.
She is sweeter far than the sweetest song.
One looks and listens the way she went,
As towards lark that is lost in the firmament.

IV.

So gladly to her I you resign,
Her caress is tenderer much than mine;
I hover round you, and hear her kiss
With wonder at its melodiousness.

V.

When you gaze on the moon, you see but her.
You hear her feet when the branches stir;
And sunrise and sunset and starlight only
Make their beauty, without her, feel more lonely.

VI.

So how should you, poet, hope to sing?
The lute of Love hath a single string.
Its note is sweet as the coo of the dove;
But 'tis only one note, and the note is Love.

VII.

But when once you have paired and built your nest,
And can brood therein with a settled breast,
You will sing once more, and your voice will stir
All hearts with the sweetness gained from her.

A LETTER FROM ITALY.

I.

LATELY, when we wished good-bye
Underneath a gloomy sky,
"Bear," you said, "my love in mind,
Leaving me not quite behind;
And across the mountains send
News and greeting to your friend."

II.

Swiftly though we did advance
Through the rich flat fields of France,
Still the eye grew tired to see
Patches of equality.
Nothing wanton, waste, or wild;
Women delving, lonely child
Tending cattle lank and lean;
Not a hedgerow to be seen,

Where the eglantine may ramble,
Or the vagrant unkempt bramble
Might its flowers upon you press,
Simple-sweet but profitless:
Jealous ditches, straight and square,
Sordid comfort everywhere.
Pollard poplars, stunted vine,
Nowhere happy-pasturing kine
Wandering in untended groups
'Mong the uncut buttercups.
All things pruned to pile the shelf;
Nothing left to be itself:
Neither horn, nor hound, nor stirrup,
Not a carol, not a chirrup;
Every idle sound repressed,
Like a Sabbath without rest.

III.

O the sense of freedom when
Kingly mountains rose again!
Congregated, but alone,
Each upon his separate throne;
Like to mighty minds that dwell,
Lonely, inaccessible,

High above the human race,
Single and supreme in space:
Soaring higher, higher, higher,
Carrying with them our desire,
Irrepressible if fond,
To push on to worlds beyond!
Many a peak august I saw,
Crowned with mist and girt with awe,
Fertilising, as is fit,
Valleys that look up to it,
With the melted snows down-driven,
Which itself received from Heaven.
Then, to see the torrents flashing,
Leaping, twisting, foaming, crashing,
Like a youth who feels, at length,
Freedom ample as his strength,
Hurrying from the home that bore him,
With the whole of life before him!

IV.

As, when summer sunshine gleams,
Glaciers soften into streams,
So to liquid, flowing vowels,
As we pierced the mountains' bowels,

Teuton consonants did melt
When Italian warmth was felt.
Gloomy fir and pine austere,
Unto precipices sheer
Clinging, as one holds one's breath,
Half-way betwixt life and death,
Changed to gently-shelving slope,
Where man tills with faith and hope,
And the tenderest-tendrilled tree
Prospers in security.
Softer outlines, balmier air,
Belfries unto evening prayer
Calling, as the shadows fade,
Halting crone, and hurrying maid,
With her bare black tresses twined
Into massive coils behind,
And her snowy-pleated vest
Folded o'er mysterious breast,
Like the dove's wings chastely crossed
At the Feast of Pentecost.
Something, in scent, sight, and sound,
Elsewhere craved for, never found,
Underneath, around, above,
Moves to tenderness and love.

V.

But three nights I halted where
Stands the temple, vowed to prayer,
That surmounts the Lombard plain,
Green with strips of grape and grain.
There, Spiaggiascura's child,
By too hopeful love beguiled,
Yet resolved, save faith should flow
Through his parched heart, to forego
Earthly bliss for heavenly pain,
Prayed for Godfrid, prayed in vain.

VI.

How looked Florence? Fair as when
Beatrice was nearly ten:
Nowise altered, just the same
Marble city, mountain frame,
Turbid river, cloudless sky,
As in days when you and I
Roamed its sunny streets, apart,
Ignorant of each other's heart,
Little knowing that our feet
Slow were moving on to meet,

And that we should find, at last,
Kinship in a common Past.
But a shadow falls athwart
All her beauty, all her art.
For alas! I vainly seek
Outstretched hand and kindling
cheek,
Such as, in the bygone days,
Sweetened, sanctified, her ways.
When, as evening belfries chime,
I to Bellosguardo climb,
Vaguely thinking there to find
Faces that still haunt my mind,
Though the doors stand open wide,
No one waits for me inside;
Not a voice comes forth to greet,
As of old, my nearing feet.
So I stand without, and stare,
Wishing you were here to share
Void too vast alone to bear.
To Ricorboli I wend:
But where now the dear old friend,
Heart as open as his gate,
Song, and jest, and simple state?

They who loved me all are fled;
Some are gone, and some are dead.
So, though young and lovely be
Florence still, it feels to me,
Thinking of the days that were,
Like a marble sepulchre.

VII.

Yet, thank Heaven! He liveth still,
Now no more upon the hill
Where was perched his Tuscan home,
But in liberated Rome:
Hale as ever; still his stride
Keeps me panting at his side.
Would that you were here to stray
With me up the Appian Way,
Climb with me the Cœlian mount,
With me find Egeria's fount,
See the clear sun sink and set
From the Pincian parapet,
Or from Sant' Onofrio watch
Shaggy Monte Cavo catch
Gloomy glory on its face,
As the red dawn mounts apace.

Twenty years and more have fled
Since I first with youthful tread
Wandered 'mong these wrecks of Fate,
Lonely but not desolate,
Proud to ponder and to brood,
Satisfied with solitude.
But as fruit that, hard in Spring,
Tender grows with mellowing,
So one's nature, year by year,
Softens as it ripens, dear,
And youth's selfish strain and stress
Sweeten into tenderness.
Therefore is it that I pine
For a gentle hand in mine,
For a voice to murmur clear
All I know but love to hear,
Crave to feel, think, hear, and see,
Through your lucid sympathy.

VIII.

Shortly, shortly, we shall meet.
Southern skies awhile are sweet;
But in whatso land I roam,
Half my heart remains at home.

Tell me, for I long to hear,
Tidings of our English year.
Was the cuckoo soon or late?
Beg the primroses to wait,
That their homely smile may greet
Faithfully returning feet.
Have the apple blossoms burst?
Is the oak or ash the first?
Are there snowballs on the guelder?
Can you scent as yet the elder?
On the bankside that we know,
Is the golden gorse ablow,
Like love's evergreen delight
Never out of season quite,
But most prodigal in Spring,
When the whitethroats pair and sing?
Tell me, tell me, most of all,
When you hear the thrushes call,
When you see soft shadows fleeting
O'er the grass where lambs are bleating,
When the lyric lark, returning
From the mirage of its yearning,—
Like a fountain that in vain
Rises but to fall again,—

Seeks its nest with drooping wing,
Do you miss me from the Spring?

IX.

Quickly then I come. Adieu,
Mouldering arch and ether blue!
For in you I sure shall find
All that here I leave behind:
Steadfastness of Roman rays
In the candour of your gaze;
In your friendship comfort more
Than in warmth of Oscan shore;
In the smiles that light your mouth,
All the sunshine of the South.

LOVE'S HARVESTING.

NAY, do not quarrel with the seasons, dear,
Nor make an enemy of friendly Time.
The fruit and foliage of the failing year
Rival the buds and blossoms of its prime.
Is not the harvest moon as round and bright
As that to which the nightingales did sing?
And thou, that call'st thyself my satellite,
Wilt seem in Autumn all thou art in Spring.
When steadfast sunshine follows fitful rain,
And gleams the sickle where once passed the plough,
Since tender green hath grown to mellow grain,
Love then will gather what it scattereth now,
And, like contented reaper, rest its head
Upon the sheaves itself hath harvested.

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